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lessons learned brief

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Iraq Local Governance Program

Military-Civilian Cooperation in Postwar Iraq: Experience with Local Governance Reconstruction

Following the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime, the coalition forces (CF) established an occupation administration in 15 of Iraq's 18 governorates. (The 3 governorates in the Kurdish Autonomous Region had not been under Saddam Hussein's control at that time.) Before the war, planners had assumed that the military would hand over postconflict reconstruction tasks relatively quickly to civilian coalition agencies, contractors, and Iraqi counterparts. However, these planning assumptions proved to be inaccurate, and the military became engaged in nation-building efforts. RTI International, through the Local Governance Program (LGP), worked closely with the military in reconstruction efforts throughout Iraq.

From March to April 2003, as the U.S.-led CF took control of Iraq, the military's tasks shifted from combat to postwar security, peacekeeping, and reconstruction. In prewar planning for the coalition's "Phase IV"(stabilization operations), military planners had assumed that the military would concentrate on establishing security, resolving pockets of resistance, and ensuring peacekeeping, while relatively intact Iraqi government institutions, supported by civilian coalition agencies and their contractors, would undertake reconstruction tasks. However, in view of the postwar chaos and collapse of Iraqi government institutions, these assumptions proved inaccurate. Instead of being able to hand over reconstruction tasks relatively quickly to civilian agencies, contractors, and Iraqi counterparts, the military became engaged in peacekeeping and nation building, initially using seized Iraqi assets.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID)/Iraq LGP, implemented by RTI International,* provided training, technical assistance, and other resources that included small grants to establish and strengthen local administrations, civic institutions, and processes in order to establish, develop, and strengthen a participatory, democratic, subnational government that delivers effective and efficient services to Iraqis. The LGP responded to specific challenges faced by subnational governments, democratic institutions and processes, and civil society organizations (CSOs). The program sought to empower individuals and civic groups to have a say in setting local social and economic development and investment priorities through democratic participation and interactions with local government leaders. The LGP began in April 2003 and ended in May 2005.

*RTI International is a trade name of Research Triangle Institute.

The LGP worked closely with the CF in governorates and municipalities throughout Iraq. This brief describes the LGP's interactions with the military and presents lessons from that experience. It is not intended as a commentary on, or critique of, the military's performance in regard to stabilization and nation building in Iraq. Rather, it offers a few selected observations based on the LGP staff's field perspectives on cooperating with the military on local governance reconstruction.

The early days: negotiating roles and expectations

Following the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime, the military established an occupation administration throughout much of Iraq, with the exception of the Kurdish governorates of Arbil, Dahuk, and As Sulaymaniyah. The military designed its administrative command structure to conform to the boundaries of the 18 existing Iraqi governorates. Each governorate was assigned a high-ranking officer (lieutenant colonel or above) as the military administrator. To facilitate interactions with the local population, these officers established local councils early in the postwar period to foster stabilization and respond to Iraqi citizens' concerns and basic needs. These councils served as mechanisms to identify and engage local leaders, address security and reconstruction issues, and manage information flow.

Following the end of formal combat operations, CF administrators were besieged with demands from Iraqis for services restoration, infrastructure reconstruction, and public order maintenance. In the absence of clear guidance on the coalition's Phase IV operations, the military devised ad hoc solutions. It relied on the creativity and ingenuity of individual officers and enlisted personnel and received support from civil affairs specialists. Civil affairs teams conducted needs assessments, area

surveys, and infrastructure inventories to develop databases and create connections with local populations. They then created the Commanders' Emergency Response Program (CERP), an important innovation initially funded through seized Ba'athist regime assets. When Ba'athist funds were expended, U.S. Congressional appropriations supplied funding for the CERP and other initiatives. The CERP provided the military with quick-response resources to engage in reconstruction and infrastructure restoration efforts. These efforts were intended to contribute to meeting the immediate humanitarian needs of Iraqi citizens and to winning their "hearts and minds," thereby aiding the military in combating the insurgency.

In the meantime, along with USAID and other contractors, the LGP began preparations in Kuwait for in-country operations in Iraq. Then, as various locations in Iraq were declared "permissive" (safe for civilian operations), LGP advance teams entered Iraq to prepare for program operations on-site. The LGP forged early working relationships with British forces stationed in Al Basrah in the South region and then with U.S. forces stationed in the South Central region and in Baghdad. In the course of start-up activities, LGP teams met with CF staff, the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Affairs (ORHA), and USAID. The LGP focused on the basic logistics of start-up, but one of its key tasks included clarifying roles, responsibilities, and working relationships of those involved. This task proved to be quite challenging because of differing points of view and expectations. The military perceived the LGP to be "relief in place" and expected to rapidly hand over public services restoration, infrastructure reconstruction planning and coordination, and relations management with newly formed local councils throughout Iraq. The military also assumed that LGP teams would operate under military direction both in Baghdad and in the governorates.

The LGP team conducted briefings with senior Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) civilian and military leadership to explain the program and its relationship to the CPA, the U.S. Department of State, and USAID and to clarify expectations regarding the LGP's scope and level of effort. Military officers were surprised to learn that the LGP's resources and personnel were insufficient to relieve the military on the scale and with the number of staff and resources envisioned. They were also surprised to discover that as a USAID-funded program, the LGP and its staff were not under direct military control. As the LGP later established additional field offices, these briefings were repeated with field commanders. For example, the Dutch CF in Al Muthanna Governorate (South region) tried to use the LGP as the sole resource for all civilian issues within the governorate, but the LGP's mandate and resource levels precluded fulfilling this function.

Further confusion emerged when the CPA replaced ORHA in mid-May 2003. Out of necessity, the military had developed plans and procedures to conduct stabilization operations; however, with the arrival of U.S. Ambassador Bremer, the CPA assumed control from the military and sought to assert authority over all reconstruction activities in Iraq. The CPA appointed governorate coordinators, who were charged with oversight and coordination of reconstruction activities among the various groups involved. These appointed coordinators and their staff were intended to function as a coordinating hub for the military's Governorate Support Teams (GSTs); the Iraqi Reconstruction and Development Council (IRDC), whose members were recruited by the U.S. Department of Defense from the Iraqi diaspora; and the LGP's teams.

When the CPA appointees began exercising their coordinating authority, they discovered a lack of clarity and consensus between the military and the CPA's civilian units about which group had the lead in working with governors and control of development funds. In some cases, the CPA's operational capacity lagged behind its nominal authority because of staffing and logistical problems. For example, many CPA governorate coordination units were not established in Iraq until September or October 2003, and often they appeared to be inadequately staffed and resourced.

The abovementioned problems notwithstanding, the LGP worked with the military's GSTs and the CPA's governorate coordinators on advisory council formation and support and on local infrastructure restoration. These cooperative efforts began in Baghdad and spread to other governorates across Iraq when areas were declared permissive. The LGP then increased in-country operations by opening and staffing field offices.

Council formation and support

U.S. Ambassador Bremer wanted to establish a new city council in Baghdad by July 2003. A joint CPA-military-LGP team prepared a timeline for establishing neighborhood advisory councils (NACs) and district advisory councils (DACs) that would form the institutional base for the Baghdad Interim City Council (ICC). The military provided security for NAC and DAC selection meetings, during which LGP staff explained the council concept and selection procedures and facilitated council formation. The military also secured buildings identified for DAC and NAC use. LGP staff provided technical assistance to civil affairs officers for council organizing, and these officers liaised with the LGP and council leaders to help councils operate effectively in cooperation with the troops assigned to Baghdad neighborhoods. By July 2003, 88 NACs, 9 DACs, and the Baghdad ICC had been established.

As mentioned previously, the military had formed local councils in Iraq's governorates to serve as communication conduits between the CF and Iraqi citizens. In some instances, the military requested LGP assistance in organizing the selection of council members. The military's council formation process had not been implemented uniformly across the country, and membership selection criteria had been ad hoc and rarely transparent. Some of

these councils functioned quite well; however, when military commanders became dissatisfied with members they had initially selected (for a variety of reasons, e.g., corruption, revelation of Ba'athist connections, or complaints from other citizens), they dissolved councils and established new ones.

"Refreshing" council membership

Many of the early councils that the military had established neither were recognized by the CPA nor benefited from the trust and respect of the local population. The military's objectives for council formation had mainly been security related and were not necessarily oriented toward fostering participatory democracy. The CPA, however, saw councils as a mechanism to introduce local democratic governance and thus issued directives to (1) reconstitute or "refresh" existing councils by replacing some of the members with new individuals selected through a transparent, open, and fair process; and (2) expand the number of councils using this new process. The LGP was charged with these tasks and worked with the military to identify councils needing "refreshment" and to approach communities that did not yet have councils and assist in establishing them.

For example, in Al Muthanna Governorate, the military had created and funded local councils. For "refreshment" purposes, an LGP team went to local subdistricts of Al Muthanna and conducted surveys using a standard format to identify community groups and local leaders. One of these subdistricts was difficult to access because it is located in the desert near the Saudi border. The military provided helicopter transportation to the subdistrict. After arriving, the LGP team and the military political adviser enlisted the *mudir al-nahiya* (the head of the subdistrict) to help identify all the interested parties, including women's groups, and asked the *mudir* to identify representatives of each group to form a caucus. One condition for caucus formation stipulated that at least 10 percent of the attendees had to be women. Before the caucus was publicly announced, the LGP presented the names of the selected caucus attendees to the governor for his comments and to the military for a security check. This process produced an acceptable slate of candidates that was respected by and representative of the citizenry. The LGP then planned an informal election to select members to serve on local councils.

For the caucus meeting, the military secured the area and used local police to conduct a security check on the people entering the meeting place. Candidates were invited to speak to the assembled group and state why they believed they would be suitable council members. Then, attendees voted with LGP-prepared paper ballots and cast them in a ballot box. The LGP gender specialist encouraged the women to come forward and vote, which they did. Each candidate's votes were then counted in front of the assembled caucus participants, and the new council members were announced.

Transferring council support functions to the LGP

Primarily, the military perceived the councils that it had established as being mechanisms to help achieve immediate postcombat stabilization objectives. Only secondarily did the military perceive them as instruments for creating a democratic infrastructure. Consequently, military commanders often set council agendas and chaired council meetings. Usually, uniformed and armed GST members were present during council meetings. In some cases, council members felt intimidated and did not feel comfortable expressing their views. Thus, while military control of councils served the military's needs, it did little to foster participatory democratic governance practices among council members. Meanwhile, the CPA had intended these council members to become contributors to the CPA's democratic nation-building effort.

LGP staff discussed the problem with the military and reached consensus on the benefits of a reduced profile for the military at council meetings and of transferring council support functions to the LGP. In most governorates, though not in all, the military subsequently transferred council capacity building and related work to the LGP. The transfer process tended to be gradual. In At Ta'mim, for example, the military first asked LGP team leaders to co-chair these meetings with the military commanders. Later, the military asked LGP team leaders to chair the meetings with the military commanders attending as observers. Next, the military commanders' attendance was reduced to intermittent visits. Finally, military personnel stopped coming to council meetings, and the meetings were conducted by the Iraqis, with the LGP providing technical assistance and training. This transfer strategy served very well to hand over council work to the LGP in a progressive and relatively seamless manner.

Infrastructure and services restoration

The collaboration between the CF, the CPA, and the LGP resulted in the rebuilding of infrastructure and the restoration of public services across Iraq. These efforts included delivery of water and electricity; trash collection and sewerage services; school reconstruction; enhanced administration of criminal justice, health and medical care, recreational and cultural activities; and commercial development support, employment generation, and other important social welfare activities.

Decentralization and local administration

Two of the LGP's objectives were related to the re-establishment of infrastructure and services: (1) quick restoration of citizen access to basic local government services, and (2) improvement in local government service delivery quality (effective, efficient, and responsive to local priorities). In addition to technical assistance, the LGP had a grants component to provide rapid assistance for small-scale infrastructure investments. These two objectives were highly congruent with the CF's "hearts and minds" strategy. Further, the LGP's emphasis on decentralization corresponded

closely with the military's structure and modus operandi for governing Iraq during the occupation. Thus, at the local level, the LGP and the military were natural allies, each one seeking to provide resources and to empower local authorities to undertake actions to serve the citizens in their communities. For example, the LGP often worked closely with the military's civil affairs officers to identify grant projects; this coordination and collaboration included joint investigation of possible projects and joint decisions on which sources of funding (e.g., LGP's rapid-response grants [RRGs] or the military's CERP funds) could better expedite the project.

Military civil affairs specialists were responsible for monitoring and supervising all functional responsibilities of Iraqi sectoral ministries within each governorate. These sectoral ministries now operated with a degree of functional decentralization that had not previously existed. Each governorate, under the control of a military officer, operated independently of the Baghdad central ministries. In many cases, the military exercised direct control over the government departments in each governorate. Later, CPA units were deployed to the governorates, and the military subsequently transferred control to these units (not without some confusion and misunderstandings about roles). The degree of local control exercised by the military and civilian CPA officials helped achieve the LGP objectives of working with local governments' service-delivery departments to build their planning, budgeting, and implementing capacity.

Gaps in institutional development expertise

Despite good intentions, the military's postconflict reconstruction practices at times undermined prospects for long-term institutional development and sustainability. For example, in Al Muthanna, the military had been generous in disbursing funds. In July 2003, the first commanding officer donated a relatively large sum of cash to the emerging local councils, neither specifying guidelines for use nor requiring expenditure accountability. Consequently, two major problems emerged. First, this action established an expectation of "free money." Councils and CSOs expected to be given funds without having to show a plan or budgetary process. Second, when the Supreme Auditor attempted to investigate claims of corruption and misuse 9 months later, he had no documentation on which to base his investigation.

In many governorates, the military restored and delivered services directly. Unlike the LGP, which required that any restored services have community stakeholders to ensure protection from looters and saboteurs, the military did not engage local community members in managing or securing the restored service or infrastructure. As a result, the infrastructure was destroyed or looted as soon as the military withdrew. Furthermore, the military did not put effort into building the capacities of the local service directorates so that these service directorates could deliver services to citizens on their own, with some resources provided first by the military and later by the CPA. In contrast, the LGP's approach was first to restore the operations of the service-delivery directorates and then to provide a combination of technical assistance, training, and RRGs for the restoration and maintenance of basic services.

In Baghdad, and in most of the country immediately after the war, public utilities assets and property had been completely looted or destroyed. For example, in the cities of Baghdad, Al Hillah, Al Basrah, Al Mawsil, and Kirkuk, trash collection equipment—containers, trucks, front-end loaders and tractors—had been damaged or looted, or had vanished. Similarly, the garages and maintenance facilities had been looted of all equipment, fuel, tools, and spare parts. All electrical wiring, outlets, and switches had been removed. Service-delivery offices had been vandalized, with desks, chairs, office equipment, and filing cabinets destroyed or carried away and customer files destroyed. The military filled this void. At first, the military used its own assets to provide garbage collection services. Later, it began subcontracting these services to the local population.

The military's quick solutions to trash collection occasionally yielded unexpected dilemmas. For example, the military was eager to get the streets cleaned in several of the low-income districts in Baghdad. Military units began hiring local contractors to build four-sided storage bins of concrete block—typically with a 2 to 5 m^3 storage capacity—to serve as trash bins for each community. Once these bins were completed, many were immediately occupied and claimed as "new homes" by Iraqi families. One family of 35 adults and children constructed a tin roof over its new "dwelling" within 24 hours of moving in. Although these Iraqis were grateful for their new "homes," the trash continued to pile up in the streets, and the military was reluctant to displace the families now residing in the concrete bins.

Community bins turned out to be the wrong choice—not only because poor neighborhood residents appropriated them for housing. Open bins with loosely deposited or bagged trash required collection crews to spend 10 to 30 minutes of collection time per site, thereby severely affecting efficiency. In contrast, a rear-load compaction truck typically used in Baghdad could lift and dump a small metal bin in less than 2 minutes. A hook-lift truck could swap out a large container in less than 10 minutes. Consequently, with LGP technical advice, the community bins were phased out and replaced with metal containers to enable efficient garbage collection.

As the above example illustrates, the military did not always have the appropriate expertise for municipal service restoration. Consequently, in some governorates, the LGP experts assumed an advisory role to the military. In Baghdad, for example, the military was overstretched, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was not always able to ensure continuity or provide the level of services needed in the city. Therefore, the LGP municipal specialists served as sources of technical expertise and became the repository of local knowledge and "memory," which newly arriving military units could access whenever troop rotations occurred.

Evolving collaborative arrangements

LGP teams were deployed first in regional hub offices and later into the governorates as these became permissive. During the LGP start-up period, the military provided support and protection; in some cases, LGP offices were collocated with military units. The LGP teams in the governorates worked closely with the military civil affairs personnel in the GSTs. The GSTs briefed the LGP teams on the prevailing situation, recent GST accomplishments, and current GST responsibilities. This was very important for LGP teams because it filled the information void on the local situation and helped the LGP determine where to concentrate its efforts. Mainly composed of a few experts and not reaching their full contingent until after September 2003, the LGP teams first worked as an integral component of the GSTs. The teams shared offices and worked on problems prioritized by the GST or the brigade commanders. When LGP teams were fully staffed and had acquired their own office space and residences, they focused on the LGP work plan and deliverables. To some degree, this resulted in a divergence of the LGP's objectives, activities, and approaches from those of the GSTs.

Communications and information sharing

Maintaining open lines of communication about LGP objectives, plans, and technical capacities helped to sustain collaboration. Information sharing was especially crucial as U.S. and British military units began to rotate out of Iraq, and the LGP began to work with Dutch, Ukrainian, Polish, Bulgarian, Thai, and other CF in various governorates. In addition to language issues, sorting through the plethora of acronyms used by the military and those used by USAID and the international development groups was a necessary part of overcoming barriers to collaboration. Communication was also impeded by hardware incompatibilities, the military's use of encrypted systems (to which civilian collaborating agencies did not have access), and the absence of functioning landlines. In many instances, the LGP and military personnel overcame these problems by meeting in person. However, with time, the increasing insurgency and deteriorating security situation made it logistically more difficult to hold such meetings. Some of these communication problems were gradually resolved as mobile phone use became more widespread.

Timeframes and schedules

The military's objectives on civil issues were generally short term and part of a "hearts and minds" operation. Military personnel had to interact with the local community in order to establish a safe and secure environment, but they were not deployed in one place for very long. Often when one group left and was replaced by another group, the previous troops' work was discontinued and the new troops started new activities. Fortunately, seamless handovers did occur in some areas. For example, in the South region, the British military had established a "handover-takeover" procedure, which it implemented when the advance party for incoming forces arrived before the departing forces had left. This procedure enabled beneficial continuity.

The LGP was able to provide continuity in several governorates by working closely with the military. For example, the CF asked the LGP team to provide continuity in Wasit Governorate when the U.S. military was preparing to withdraw prior to the arrival of the Ukrainian military. At that time, a small LGP team was in place and providing technical assistance to governorate officials and administrators. Aware of the scheduled departure of the U.S. military from the governorate, the military commander and the LGP team leader for Wasit devised a successful handover and exit strategy.[1]

Lessons

Beginning in the early days of postcombat Iraq, the LGP worked closely with the CF. The LGP's collaboration began with the U.S. forces in Baghdad, the British forces in Al Basrah, and the U.S. First Marine Expeditionary Force in the South Central region of the country. The LGP then worked with the U.S. military in the North region. As military units were rotated out, LGP teams worked with other military units as partners in strengthening local government. It is difficult to characterize all of these varied experiences, and this brief cannot capture them all. The following lessons emerged from the selected reflections of those who worked with the military in various contexts.

Recognizing and acknowledging gaps in expertise

Restoring public service delivery in a postconflict environment requires close collaboration between the military and civilian contractors, with the civilian contractors taking the lead on technical direction and tasks. Although individual military personnel may have relevant expertise (e.g., civil affairs units), the military's comparative advantage is not in service delivery and capacity building. Civilian agencies and contractors are in a much better position to identify local public-service providers, assess the service needs of the population, and work with service providers and the community to restore services. The military can play a supportive role by maintaining security and making some of its assets available for immediate infrastructure reconstruction

[1] The exit and handover strategy was structured as follows:

- The civil affairs unit assigned to the military commander of Wasit would collaborate with the LGP by sharing information and resources until the scheduled departure of the military.
- The LGP would recruit and employ a cadre of approximately 20 Iraqi professionals, who would be trained by the U.S. military civil affairs unit and be under LGP supervision, to understand and monitor the various governmental agencies located within the governorate.
- After the departure of the U.S. military and its civil affairs unit, the LGP team leader, with the support of the newly employed local Iraqi staff, would oversee governmental operations within the governorate until the arrival of the CPA's appointee.
- The LGP team leader would brief the CPA appointee and the Ukrainian military upon their arrival and their assumption of duties within the governorate.
- The LGP team leader would collaborate closely with the Ukrainian military upon its assumption of military and security responsibilities for the governorate.

as needed. Because the military is the first group to enter the country, military personnel can be instrumental in providing civilian contractors with information and local contacts that can facilitate the start of civilian reconstruction operations. For example, GST-provided information was critical in helping LGP teams initiate field activities. Once civilian agencies and contractors are in place, however, they should take the lead in reconstruction and service-delivery restoration. Such a handover of responsibilities can help avoid situations where well-meaning military staff seeking to address immediate needs may inadvertently undermine long-term institutional development.

Ensuring mutual understanding of military and civilian objectives and mandates

In postconflict reconstruction settings, military and civilian agencies often have differing but mutually dependent objectives. When the military is responsible for or takes on reconstruction tasks, as was the case in Iraq, these objectives interconnect and overlap. Clearly, better advance planning for postcombat Iraq would have expedited the restoration of peace and stability. The unanticipated extent of the postwar looting and infrastructure destruction, as noted previously, exacerbated the reconstruction challenge. The military and civilian agencies felt acute pressure to take action. Conflict, misunderstanding, and lack of agreement between the CPA and military staff created confusion and, on occasion, placed LGP and other reconstruction programs in difficult situations. In some instances, these disagreements led to basic service-restoration delays, resulted in disillusionment of the Iraqi population, and caused missed opportunities to win "hearts and minds." Funding bottlenecks occurred, and both civilian and military staff made promises that were not always kept. From the beginning, it is important to establish objectives and scope, communicate these to all involved, and clarify and communicate which resources each group can contribute. Not all objectives need to be the same; however, areas of overlap and interdependence should be clearly identified.

Providing continuity for the reconstruction effort

To avoid disruption of security and service-delivery restoration, the military must have an established handover procedure for troop rotations. In addition, when the military withdraws from civil administration, it is critical that all parties work to ensure a seamless transition and have well-planned and adequately resourced alternatives. Establishing points of contact between the military and the civilian contractors can facilitate such a transition. Both sides—the military and civilian contractors—should be prepared to supply a list of contacts related to each of the major issues. In addition, regular coordination meetings between the military and the civilian contractors are highly beneficial, particularly when other forms of communication are irregular or nonexistent.

Maintaining communication

An overarching lesson from the LGP's experience working with the military is that establishing and maintaining good and effective communication is critical: Communication is necessary for sharing information, clarifying roles and expectations, and coordinating operational activities in the field. As mentioned previously in this brief, military communications systems are not geared to engage with civilian partner organizations. Therefore, the various groups may need to use in-person contact in the absence of other alternatives. Over time, the LGP's communication with military counterparts became easier as e-mail and mobile phone systems were established. Effective communication protocols facilitated the coordination of security arrangements, evacuation contingencies, and other vital plans. The LGP relied heavily on such protocols in the wake of the Muqtada al-Sadr uprising and the growth of the insurgency, which forced the program to reduce and restructure its field presence from sites in 17 governorates to 4 regional hubs and the Baghdad offices.

Military-Civilian Cooperation in Postwar Iraq: Experience with Local Governance Reconstruction was written by Derick W. Brinkerhoff and Samuel Taddesse, based on LGP documents and input from Peter Benedict, Alistair Blunt, John Doane, John Glazebrook, and Edward Mazuroski.

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